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U.S. warns Iran about hostages in Lebanon

LONDON (UPI) — The United States secretly warned Iran that it faces military retaliation if Americans recently kidnapped in Lebanon are tried or executed, The Sunday Times reported.

Western intelligence sources said the White House warning was conveyed to Iran by the Swiss diplomatic mission in Tehran in early March, the paper reported.

Five Americans, including a diplomat, a Roman Catholic priest and an Associated Press reporter, are missing since they were kidnapped in Beirut in the last year. The Islamic Jihad, an extremist Moslem group with connections to the Iranian government of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, said it is holding all of them.

In Washington, the State Department would neither confirm nor deny such a message was sent to Iran.

Last week, Robert McFarlane, President Reagan's national security chief, advocated American military action against Iran in a talk to a defense forum in Washington.

The Sunday Times said the message to Iran did not specify what action Washington would take if the hostages are harmed, but that U.S. intelligence has been asked to recommend suitable targets.

They include Iran's big oil terminal at Kharg Island at the head of the Persian Gulf, the emergency oil export terminal at the Sirri Islands farther south and the commercial ports of Bushire and Bandar Khomeini.

The Texas, a U.S. guided missile cruiser operating in the Gulf area, is the most likely launching pad for a U.S. strike, the Western intelligence sources told the paper.

WASHINGTON TIMES
1 April 1985

The five Americans who have disappeared in Lebanon are:

- William Buckley, 56, a political officer at the U.S. Embassy, snatched from his car in west Beirut more than a year ago.

- The Rev. Benjamin Weir, 60, a Presbyterian minister kidnapped near his house last May.

- Peter Kilburn, 60, a librarian at the American University of Beirut, who disappeared last November.

- The Rev. Martin Lawrence Jenco, director of Catholic Relief Services in Lebanon, who was abducted by a carload of men last Jan. 8.

- Terry A. Anderson, chief Middle East correspondent and Beirut bureau manager for the Associated Press, kidnapped March 16 by three gunmen in west Beirut.